

Chicago, IL - U.S. Reps. Mark Kirk (R-Highland Park) and Judy Biggert (R-Hinsdale) convened an ad-hoc congressional field hearing today to focus on the needs of military reservists and their families. Illinois employers and reservists joined commanders from the Illinois National Guard and the Naval Service Training Command Midwest Region to brief Kirk and Biggert on ways to improve the quality of life for reservists and their dependents.

“In the Cold War, the reserves were a force of last resort, rarely called to active duty,” said Congressman Kirk. “Today they make up almost half of the forces deployed in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq. Nearly forty percent of reservists suffer a loss of income when they go on active duty. When our country calls, reservists and national guardsmen should not suffer financially while serving on the front line.”

The nation is increasing its reliance on reservists. During the Cold War, reservists served an average total of one million man days per year. In the 1990s, this total rose to 13 million. In 2003, reservists and national guardsmen served 63 million man days. During the War on Terror between September 11, 2001 and December 21, 2004, over 450,000 Americans were called to active duty.

The increased demand for reservists on active duty is taking its toll on recruitment. In 2002, the Army National Guard met 105% of its recruiting goals. By 2005, that number had fallen to just 74%. Other services are faring better. For example in 2004, the Air Force reserve met 111% of its recruiting goals.

“The role of our military has changed, and with it, so has the role of our reserve forces,” said U.S. Representative Judy Biggert (R-IL-13). “We now depend on our reserves on a daily basis to sustain our military commitments throughout the world. This change has brought with it unforeseen challenges, and it’s time that we in Congress focus on what we can do to help soldiers, their families and their employers make ends meet.”

Congressman Kirk is one of only five members of Congress who are still serving in the reserves. Kirk, a naval reserve intelligence officer, serves weekend duty as the Assistant Deputy Director in the Pentagon’s War Room. He was previously called to active duty during conflicts with Bosnia, Kosovo and Iraq. “Churchill called reservists ‘twice a citizen’”. Seeing the strains on reservists, I am working on legislation to improve the pay and benefits of reservists

while on active duty. Our bill, the “Americans in Uniform Act of 2005”, will be introduced next month to improve the lives of reservists.”

Briefing Kirk and Biggert on specific data showing a drastic increase in Reserve manpower and the present needs of our Reserve force were Rear Admiral Gary R. Jones, Commander, Naval Service Training Command/Navy Region Midwest, Captain James Monahan, Commander, Navy Reserve Readiness Command Midwest, Captain Terry Wilson, Commander, Naval Reserve Center Chicago, Ms. Pat Murray, Ombudsman Navy Cargo Handling Battalion 7, U.S. Naval Reserve, Great Lakes, IL., and Lt. Col Alicia Tate-Nadeau, Director Public Affairs, Illinois National Guard.

Several Illinois employers won national recognition for their support of their reservist employees. They spoke before Kirk and Biggert to share details on their model pay and benefit packages they use to support their reservists and families. Unfortunately, not all employers are so generous and many reservists face a reduction in pay when they are called to active duty.

“I applaud employers like CDW, Northrop Grumman, Sears, Hewitt and UPS for taking the lead to assure their employees serving in the country’s reserves do not suffer financial losses while away from their jobs,” said Kirk. “All employers in Illinois should follow their lead to support reservists and their families.”

“Too often, our reservists are forced to give up a part of their income when they are called to serve, and too often, businesses struggle to absorb the loss of employees,” said Biggert. “The employers we met with today are outstanding examples of how to best prevent reservists and their families from suffering financially, while keeping business profitable. I applaud them and strongly encourage other businesses to follow their lead.”

Illinois is home to two of Forbes magazine’s top ten U.S. companies identified as best employers for reservists. One of those companies is Computer Discount Warehouse (CDW) located in Vernon Hills. Jim Shanks, President of CDW-G says their company’s policy benefits the employee, company and nation.

“A strong reservist policy shows a company’s commitment to the welfare of the nation. Providing benefits to reservists, such as supplemental pay during a co-worker’s military leave, not only

alleviates financial stress for loved ones at home, but also encourages reservists to continue their commitment to the armed forces. It also inspires loyalty to the company, increasing worker retention and satisfaction,” said Shanks.

Hewitt Associates, the second largest employer in Congressman Kirk’s district, employs a number of reservists currently serving their country. Bill Widmar, a Major in the Army Reserves and Consultant in Information Systems for Hewitt, shared his personal story of how Hewitt’s policies offered peace-of-mind knowing his family was financially secure while he is deployed.

“Hewitt’s generous leave of absence policy for those serving in the reserves gives me and my family financial security while I am called to active duty. Their exemplary treatment of employees makes Hewitt a premiere company to work for.”

Corporate testimony was also provided by Shelly Carlin, Vice President of Benefits for Sears, Frank Styzek, Manager of Compensation, Benefits and Human Resource Information Systems for Northrop Grumman, Scott Hastings, an Illinois Air National Guard Reservist and manager of Logistic Systems for Northrop Grumman, Elaine Masterson, Leader of Workforce Relations for Hewitt Associates, Jimmy Millard, Human Resources Manager for UPS and Marcy Boyan, Operations Manager for UPS. All of these companies are recognized for their outstanding Reservists’ policies.

Kirk, a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Military Quality of Life and Veterans Affairs, and Biggert, a member of the Education and Workforce Committee, believe Congress must act to address the needs of reservists. “The American all-volunteer military has delivered victory after victory for the United States. The kind of reforms we are outlining are needed to make sure that success continues”, Kirk said.

Kirk will use today’s testimony to prepare legislation – the Americans in Uniform Act of 2005 -- to address issues ranging from health care needs for Reservists and their families to reservist compensation, tax credits for employers, transformation initiatives, troop rebalancing plans, pay differential, and equipment and training requirements.

The term “Reserve Component” is often used to refer collectively to the seven individual reserve components of the armed forces: 1) the Army National Guard of the United States, 2) the Army

Reserve, 3) the Naval Reserve, 4) the Marine Corps Reserve, 5) the Air National Guard of the United States, 6) the Air Force Reserve, and 7) the Coast Guard Reserve. The Army National Guard and the Air National Guard have both a federal and state role. They also assist the states in responding to various emergencies, such as disasters and civil disorders.

Contact: Matt Towson
847-940-0202
cell: 773-454-5396